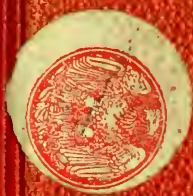


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MR. STRONG'S

CENTURY SERMON.
at Somers.



A

SERMON,

DELIVERED LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 6, 1828,

SOON AFTER THE

ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH IN SOMERS.

WITH A

SKETCH

OF SOME LEADING EVENTS

IN THE

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH AND CONGREGATION.

BY WILLIAM L. STRONG, A. M.
PASTOR OF THE CHURCH IN SOMERS.

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A SERMON, &c.

DEUTERONOMY 32 : 7.

“Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will show thee, thy elders, and they will tell thee.”

THE history of the children of Israel, is replete with instruction. From the first calling of their progenitor, down to the removal of the sceptre from Judah, and their dispersion among the nations, their faith was marked with tokens of the Divine presence and guardianship. There is no period of their existence as a people, in which we may not select a variety of facts designed for the encouragement or warning of succeeding generations. This is true, peculiarly, of that part of their history recorded in the books of Moses, embracing their continuance in Egypt, their wanderings in the wilderness, and their miraculous entrance upon the promised land: a period more distinguished by Divine wonders, than even a much longer period in the history of any other people. For this reason, it is, that the period alluded to, is so often mentioned by the inspired penman, and the children of Israel are so abundantly encouraged to make it a subject of their serious attention and inquiry. To this employment, the Jewish lawgiver invites his people, at the very moment when nothing but the swellings of Jordan, separates them from the object of their hopes and toils. “Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will show thee, thy elders, and they will tell thee.” Very few of those addressed by Moses on this occasion, were old enough to have witnessed the plagues of Egypt, or to understand, fully, the providences, which marked the earlier period of their deliverance. A few of the fathers and elders remembered the wormwood and the gall, and, if inquired of, could tell of the scenes which they witnessed. From *their* fathers they had learned many things respecting several generations; and they were hence prepared to hand down many interesting facts of their history, for the instruction of others.

The generation who then listened to the last counsels of Moses, might derive many advantages from inquiring after these facts.

The history of other nations, though not exhibiting, so immediately, the hand of an over-ruling Providence, is not without its interest, and may be examined with signal advantage, by succeeding generations. Hence it has been ever so much of an object with the wise and good to induce mankind, and particularly the young, to study the history of their ancestors. The early history of this country, has awakened the liveliest interest of the children of the Puritans, in every succeeding generation. And there is no people, whose existence has been perpetuated during a century, or for several generations, whose history is so devoid of incidents, and facts, illustrative of the principles of the Divine government, and of the connection of human actions, that it may not be studied with gratification and advantage.

It will be my object in this discourse, to inquire what things we should remember in respect to former generations: and then to suggest some facts in the history of this church and people.

FIRST, I shall suggest some things which we should remember, in respect to former generations.

The inquiry would be interesting, should we apply it to all the past generations of men. It is, however, adapted to awaken a deeper interest in a more particular application to the country to which we belong, or to the smaller communities with which we are associated.

1. We should remember in respect to former generations, that *they have passed away*.

"One generation passeth away and another generation cometh." The earth remains without essential change, during every successive period of our mortal existence, but its inhabitants, are, in their turn, passing away. "Our fathers, where are they, and the prophets, do they live for ever?" Where are the generations of men that lived and acted before the flood, those fathers, who resisted the encroachments of the great destroyer, for almost a thousand years? Alas, not one of them remains to tell us the story of their times. Where are the

patriarchs, those venerable men, who were so long the depositaries of the church of God? Where are Saul, and David, and Solomon, and all the kings that sat upon the throne of Israel and Judah: and where are Samuel, and that long line of prophets, whose names are associated with the penmen of the sacred records? And where shall we look for the associates of our Saviour, the apostles and fathers of the christian church? They have passed away: their work was finished, and they have been hurried off the stage, to make room for the crowding generations that have followed them. Nor need we look so far back. Where are the many generations of the fathers of this country, the first emigrants that set their feet on these distant shores. They left their country and their homes, to escape the persecutions to which their religion subjected them, and to enjoy, in this new world, the religious liberty which was denied them in the old. Where are the Winthrops, the Bradfords, the Winslows, the Eatons, the Hopkinses, those pious and distinguished civilians, that adorned the chair of state, when our fathers first established a government in New-England? And where are those venerable Divines, the Allens, the Cottons, the Mathers, the Davenports, and a great variety of others, who were the fathers of the church? They lived and labored for Christ, but the generation to which they belonged, has passed away. None of them have lived to witness the changes which two centuries have produced, and to rejoice, or mourn, as those changes have been friendly, or hostile to the cause of the Redeemer. Every successive generation, from that period to the present, except that which is now performing its part on the busy stage, has come forward, and spent its day, and has then retired behind the curtain, to make room for others, who have, in *their* turn, passed to the land of forgetfulness.

But we are more interested to inquire after the generations of our fathers, who have, before us, walked these streets, and cultivated these fields. Including those who first settled this town, and those who are now on the stage, four generations have already taken their part in the important concerns of the community. With the

exception of here and there an individual, who has out-lived his early associates, and stands as a connecting link between one generation and another, three of them have already passed away, and form the great assemblage in our cemeteries. We learn the names of those who were the first settlers of this town, on the monuments which record the time when they lived, and the places where their bodies were laid. The names of Jones, of Sexton, of Root, of Pease, of Parsons, of Horton, of Felt, of Kibbe, of Purchase, and of Chapin, are familiar in the early history of this society. But where are the persons whom they represented? They live only in their posterity : themselves have ceased to be interested in the affairs of mortals. The second generation, some of them within the remembrance of my audience, have also, without exception, been numbered with the dead. A few of the third, are still tottering on the verge of their mortal existence. How many, my hearers, within our own remembrance, have passed away ! How many that, but yesterday occupied these seats, are seen no more among the living ! Where are those fathers and mothers that, at the time of my ordination, occupied the advance seats, in this sacred temple ! A small number are still with us : but by far the largest proportion have ceased to be found in our assemblies. Their places are occupied by others. Since my residence in this place, almost four hundred and a quarter of its inhabitants, about one third of the whole population, have died. What amazing ravages has death made in the families of this people, even within the compass of a little more than twenty years. Cast your eyes at the commencement of almost any of our streets, and trace it from house to house, and mark the changes which a few years have made in the occupants, and what will be the result ? In how many instances will it be found, that the former tenants have passed away ; another generation has taken possession.

2. In remembering the days of old, we should consider the dealings of God with past generations, as a *ground of gratitude*.

In the 107th Psalm, the writer rehearses many striking

instances of the Divine goodness, to the former generations of Israel, particularly during their march through the wilderness, and calls upon their posterity to cherish feelings of gratitude. "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men." Many were the interpositions of God in their favor. He delivered them from their bondage in Egypt: fed them with food from heaven, in the wilderness: defended them from their enemies, and, by a series of miracles, drove out the heathen before them, gave them cities to dwell in, and a fruitful country as their inheritance. These distinguished blessings imposed obligations of gratitude, not merely upon the immediate subjects of them, but upon their posterity. To these blessings they were indebted for the rich inheritance which had come into their possession. The same hand that delivered their fathers from the iron grasp of Egyptian oppression, broke the yoke, also, from the necks of their children.

The same blessings may not have distinguished the early progenitors of every people, still there are others, that should awaken the liveliest gratitude. Every people may be called to remember many things in the generations of their fathers, to which they cannot look back without satisfaction, and *ought* not to look back, without hearts expanded with grateful emotions. Whatever they may be, most unworthily, does any people regard them with indifference. Have our ancestors been christians and not heathen? Shall we not bless God that we were not born on the banks of the Ganges, that we did not draw in with our first breath, the polluted atmosphere of heathen idolatry, or Mahomedan imposture? Were our ancestors eminently holy men, and did they, in the closet, in the family, and in the sacred temple of the Lord, lift up their fervent and unceasing supplications that their posterity might fear God and work righteousness? And were they ever intent, in adopting a system of means to secure the object of their desire? Shall we not call upon our souls to bless that kind Providence that favored us with such a parentage?

When we look back upon the generations of our an-

cestors, do we find the finger of God directing them to the right way, turning their attention to the best means of securing the happiness of those who should come after them, succeeding the means of their choice, and bringing upon themselves, the blessings which they purposed to treasure up for their children? Shall not our hearts instinctively inquire, "what shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits?" And especially, should we not bless the God of our fathers, if, in remembering the days of old, we find him inclining them to lay, deep and broad, the foundations of those civil, literary, and religious institutions, which are the glory of any people, where they are established, and yield to a community so rich a harvest of blessings? Base, indeed, must be that people, who, looking back upon such an ancestry, can so far deny, or overlook the providence of God, as not to acknowledge the obligations thereby imposed upon themselves.

3. In remembering the past generations of their ancestors, a people should consider them in *comparison with the present generation*.

It is an opinion much too prevalent among many, that the present generation is wiser, and, perhaps, better than those which have passed away. Hence, former opinions, by this class of persons, are exploded, with scarcely a semblance of investigation, and the decisions of the pious, regarded, as little better than the surmises of *well-meaning*, perhaps, but bigotted men. Few there are, at best, that are disposed to admit the idea that the generation to which they belong, has already taken some steps in a course of degeneracy. To this point, then, should we direct our attention, while we bring into remembrance the years of past generations. What were their principles and characters? Especially, what was their engrossing object as a community; the object to which they looked with a steady and absorbing attention? Was it their solemn purpose to render every thing subservient to the cause of religion, and their practice to make their houses, houses of prayer, and to inculcate upon their children, the love and fear of God? And what were their principles, in respect to

the influence which religion ought to have upon themselves and others, as members of civil society? Do we view them as laboring to model their forms of government, their schools, colleges, and religious institutions, all, with an ultimate regard to the prosperity of Christ's kingdom? These features, in the principles and character of former generations, (and they are not merely fancies, especially in regard to the first fathers of this country,) should be remembered, in comparison with what may prevail among those that are now upon the stage. Does the present generation stand upon the same eminence in point of moral principles and efforts? A remembrance of what is past, when contrasted with what is now present before us, may lead to the most humiliating conviction of modern degeneracy. What, on examination, will be found to be *now* the absorbing principle? What if it should be found that the *world* is the object which occupies and fills the centre of vision? Some, indeed, do still prefer Jerusalem above their chief joy. They would regard every interest in subserviency to the interest of the Redeemer. But are these the feelings of the great body of *any* community? Take a people who may be regarded as possessing the greatest strength of moral feeling. How would the present generation, even in our own country, bear a comparison, in this respect, with their Puritan ancestors? Has there been no falling away from the stern virtue of these venerable men? In what portion of this community can we find a state of things which will bear comparison with that which existed among *them*? In what single town or parish, can we find a family altar in every house, the church comprising almost every member of the congregation, and the prosperity of religion entering into the plans of nearly the whole community?

Were we to look at the standard of *morals*, which existed in the first days of this country, and contrast, with it, the tone of feeling which marks the present generation, should we not find, here, also, much cause for humiliation? Where is the universal respect for the holy Sabbath, the general attendance on public worship, and the reverence for the name of God, which distinguished

the character of our fathers? Though these sacred things are guarded by human statutes, who does not know that the laws of the Sabbath are trampled upon; the public worship of God deserted by a large portion of the community, and his holy name profaned? "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!"

4. In looking back to former generations, we should remember their *errors to avoid them*.

While many are disposed to place an undue value upon every thing modern, and to depreciate, in the same proportion, every thing ancient; there are some who fall into the other extreme. Every thing associated with ancient times is esteemed venerable, and not unfrequently adopted with little to recommend it except its origin. In this way a multitude of errors are covered over which materially subtract from schemes of public improvement, in other respects, most wisely conceived. But this is not a judicious consideration of the days of old. Let a wise discrimination be observed on this subject. Every thing is not wise which entered into the plans of past generations, not even the most enlightened. On this principle, every thing belonging to former years would be sanctioned, and the door to improvement be effectually closed. To how few things can we turn our eyes which have not been adopted into the early principles and practices of the most enlightened and even christian nations? Shall all these, without discrimination, be adopted into modern systems of civil society? While we adopt those things which have received the sanction of experience, and are not to exchange them for new experiments, we should not imagine that there may not be found, in the best forms of government, in the wisest systems of education, the most enlightened religious institutions, some things which ought to be discarded. Human wisdom, developed under the most favorable circumstances, is not so perfect: human nature is not so pure. Let us, then, remember the errors of former generations,—let us hear the voice of their failures, warning us off from those rocks and shoals on which many of their fairest hopes have been shipwrecked. Let us avoid all those princi-

ples and measures, which have involved them in difficulty, or which have been marked with the displeasure of God. By thus avoiding every thing which has been found to be fraught with mischief, and incorporating into our systems, civil, moral and literary, nothing but the *wisdom* of former ages, we shall, as a nation, and as smaller communities, be blessed of God, and become partakers of all that happiness and prosperity which, in his providence, he is pleased to allot to the present state of existence.

5. In remembering the years of past generations, we should consider the *lessons of wisdom* which they have left for their posterity.

Every wise people, in making provision for their own welfare, will have respect to the bearing which the measures they adopt may have upon their unborn descendants. This is demanded by that law of benevolence which obliges them to consult the happiness of others, and by that natural affection which induces every man to desire the happiness of his own offspring. Hence it generally happens that nations, and even smaller communities, partake, to some extent, of the character of their ancestors. The principles which *they* adopted, and the institutions they established, as well as the habits they formed, are visible in the habits, the character and institutions of distant descendants. May we not say too, that a people owe it to their fathers, to cherish those bequests which their wisdom and piety have handed down, and still more, if the inheritance has been purchased by privations, toils and blood?

Most defective, therefore, must be that view which a people take of the days of old, if it do not lead them to inquire into the principles they adopted, and the means they employed in laying the foundation of their future prosperity. Shall they not inquire on what principles they laid the foundation of their government; what civil institutions were built upon it; on what principles they established their religious institutions; in what manner they guarded them against the undermining influence of worldliness and indifference; and in what manner they regarded schools, and the general diffusion of knowledge

in the community? Into all these subjects which enter so essentially into the virtue and happiness of society, every people should be anxious to make the most diligent inquiry. Let them ask their fathers, and they will show them, their elders, and they will tell them. Do they find they were blessed with ancestors that commenced their existence, as a people, in the fear of God: ancestors who were careful to make provision for the establishment of all those institutions which they considered as adapted to make themselves and their children, free, enlightened and virtuous? And what do they find was the result of such a beginning? Have a succession of generations afforded evidence that righteousness exalteth a nation, and that no people is so wise as that which lays the foundation of its institutions on the broad basis of civil freedom, a diffusion of knowledge through the community, and the fear of the Lord? If these are found to be the consequences of such a beginning, how can those who have derived their existence from such a people, regard their history in any other light than as instructing them how to secure their own welfare, and to transmit the greatest amount of good to their posterity, and cautioning them against abandoning a policy which has been so prolific in blessings upon their ancestors and themselves.

We proceed, **SECONDLY**, to call to remembrance some facts in the history of this church and people, and to apply the subject to ourselves.

I am led to communicate some facts relative to our history, from the period in our existence, as a church and people, at which we have arrived.

One hundred years, last March, the fifteenth day, or according to the reckoning since the establishment of New-Style, the twenty-sixth, this church was first organized. It may be interesting and profitable to the descendants of those men who first associated themselves for the worship of God in this place, and for us all, who at later periods have become connected with them, to look back and, as far as records, and authentic tradition will permit, to review their history, and to trace their progress from their first organization to the state in which we now behold them.

It is a fact well known to most of the audience, that this town originally formed a part of Enfield, and that both were comprehended in the limits of the ancient town of Springfield. Enfield was first settled by a few families belonging to Springfield. In May, 1683, these families, having obtained the approbation of the town to which they belonged, petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts to be formed into a separate society, or township. In this petition they pray that its limits may be extended ten miles from Connecticut river, in order that the town may contain a suitable proportion of good land. This petition seems to have been promptly granted, and in conformity to it, a town to have been laid out, extending from Long Meadow brook, six miles on the river, and ten miles back to the mountain. This grant included not only Enfield as it now is, but the present town of Somers. There is one fact connected with our early history which I must not omit. The first settlers of Enfield were not regardless of the condition and rights of the Indians, nor disposed to take possession of their lands, without compensation. To extinguish their title to the land, granted them by the General Court, they stipulated with the Indians to give them twenty-five pounds sterling. For this sum, by no means inconsiderable, the cheapness of land, in those days, being regarded, the Indian Chief Totaps, or Totatuck, alienated all right, except that of hunting and fishing, which the Indians claimed, or possessed, to the whole town. The instrument containing this alienation and conveyance is upon record, and bears date March 16, 1688. It must be grateful to the feelings of a christian people to reflect that they occupy lands, not taken from the original proprietors by force, but obtained by fair purchase.

Although the grant of the whole township extending to the eastern limits of this town, was obtained from the Court and from the Indians, the eastern part was not settled, even by a solitary individual, for almost twenty years. It was too far from the principle settlements in Enfield to tempt persons who could procure land much nearer, to come into the wilderness. It is difficult to say how far the few Indians that still hunted over these

grounds, for deer and other game, might have deterred the settlement. The enterprising spirit of our ancestors however at length broke through every difficulty. The first person that made the attempt was Benjamin Jones, from Enfield street. He commenced a summer residence about the year 1706, near the foot of the mountain, on the principal road which passes through the town from Enfield to Stafford. In the winter and at other times when he apprehended danger, he returned to his former place of residence.

The example of Mr. Jones was not followed by any for several years. About the year 1713, he was joined by some others from the older settlements in Enfield. From this time the settlement proceeded with more rapidity, so that within five or six years liberty was granted to build a pound for the convenience of the inhabitants, and about the year 1719, a bridge at considerable expense, was reared over Scantick. Among the persons who resided in town as early as the year 1730, may be mentioned the names of Benjamin Jones, James Pease, Timothy Root, John Mc Gregory, Edward Kibbe, Robert Pease, Nathaniel Horton, James Killam, Josiah Wood, Nathaniel Collins, Benjamin Cittron, Ebenezer Jones, James Wood, John Davis, Joseph Sexton, Luke Parsons, James Blood, John Parsons, Thomas Purchase, Samuel Rockwood, Samuel Felt, Jonathan Purchase, Israel Kibbe, Jacob Kibbe, Benjamin Thomas and Joseph Fisk. Most of these persons came from the old town of Enfield. The rest from Pomfret, Northampton, Wallingford, Longmeadow, Springfield, Mendon, and other towns. On examination it will be found that a large proportion of the present inhabitants are descendants from these original settlers.

Soon after the first settlements, the inconvenience of attending public worship in Enfield street, led those who loved the habitations of Zion, to desire the preaching of the Gospel among themselves. Accordingly, as early as the year 1721, the town, on their desire probably, voted that the inhabitants of the east part have liberty to hire preaching three or four months in the winter, and on condition that they do so, that they be excused

from paying their proportion of the tax in the town street. The next year the town voted the same privilege so soon and so long as they should have an able orthodox minister among them, or settled among them. About this time, it is probable, commenced those efforts which looked to the speedy settlement of a minister. This people did not however exist as a separate society until the year 1723, when the town voted that there be a precinct in the east part of the town, the line commencing at the mouth of Coronation brook, as the stream was then called, which runs across the main Enfield road, in the south western corner of Somers. From that time the town went under the name of the East Precinct, or East Enfield, and transacted its ecclesiastical affairs in the capacity of a society. The first records to be found are the records of the town existing as a precinct. In 1734, it was separated from Enfield, and incorporated into a new town with the name of Somers. It was not until the year 1749, that the town transacted its business under the government of Connecticut.

The proprietors of the original town of Enfield made early provision for the establishment of a gospel ministry in this place. As early as 1718, looking forward to the time when this would become a distinct people, they appropriated two hundred acres of land, and afterwards sixty acres in addition, for the benefit of the first settled minister. Besides this a few acres of Scantick meadow were given for the permanent support of the gospel. The value of the last mentioned land is still retained by the society.

The people of this town made early efforts to procure and settle a minister. They did not however succeed in this object until the year 1727. On the 15th of March of that year, on the recommendation of the association, they settled Mr. Samuel Allis. Mr. Allis was educated at Cambridge college, and studied divinity under Mr. Stoddard, of Northampton, the maternal grandfather of the former President Edwards. On the same day the church was gathered and consisted of nine male members; no females having been of the number of the first church. At the first sacrament, the May following, twelve other

persons were added to their number. The names of those first gathered into a church were, Samuel Allis, Nathaniel Horton, Josiah Wood, James Wood, Josiah Wood, Jr. Benjamin Thomas, Luke Parsons, Nathaniel Horton, Jr. and Joseph Fisk. The persons added at the first sacrament were, Thomas Purchase, John Parsons, Robert Pease, Israel Kibbe, Samuel Rockwood, Samuel Felt, with their wives, and Edward Kibbe. The next February eight more were received to full communion, making, including three or four received by letter, more than thirty persons. Such was the commencement of the church in this place, when all the inhabitants of the town consisted of less than two hundred. Four years after the first organization of the church, in 1731, a meeting house was built, when, as I have been informed, all the inhabitants of the town could sit at once on its sills. This house was situated a little north of where we now are, and though long unfinished, was occupied more than fifty years, and was not abandoned until September 30, 1787, on which day the house where we now are worshipping, was first occupied. Mr. Allis continued in the work of the ministry here about twenty years. In the spring of 1747, he was dismissed. He lived in town after his dismissal nearly fifty years, and died December 18, 1796, at the advanced age of 91. During his ministry there seem to have been two or three seasons of special attention to religion among the people. The revival that spread over the country in the years 1740 and 1741, reached this church. Of this Mr. Allis gave some account to the public in a letter to Rev. Mr. Cooper, of Boston, which was afterwards published in Gillies' Historical Collection. This season extended over a part of two years. During sixteen months in 1741 and '42, about sixty were received into the church by profession. At a previous period, between the months of June, 1735, and May, 1736, there were admitted twenty-six to full communion.

On the 6th of July, 1748, Mr. Fregrace Leavett, from Suffield, was ordained to the work of the ministry in this church. Mr. Leavett was graduated at Yale college in the year 1745. He was possessed of a discriminating

sound mind: was a good preacher, and died after a little more than thirteen years service, aged 42, greatly lamented by his people. From the early part of his ministry there have been in this place, dissenters from the congregational mode of worship. During a considerable portion of the time which has since elapsed, a meeting has been kept up on the Sabbath, and for a part of it the meeting has been served by a minister particularly ordained for that service. This meeting was discontinued about twenty years ago. For about five years past, meetings more or less stated have been held in the same part of the town.

After the death of Mr. Leavett, the church made several unsuccessful attempts to settle a successor. At length serious divisions occurred: the church was divided into two parts, worshipped and attended on ordinances at different places for more than four years. Another meeting house was erected, and there was reason to fear that these divisions would terminate in permanent alienation. But in the good providence of God, every difficulty was happily adjusted, and the church became reunited, December 8, 1773.

On the 10th of August, 1774, Mr. Charles Backus took the pastoral charge of the united church. Mr. Backus was educated at Yale College, and studied divinity with the Rev. Doctor Hart, of Preston. The sermon at his ordination was preached by the Rev. John Ellis, of Franklin. His continuance in the ministry was about twenty-nine years. During more than two years, the latter part of his life, he languished under a threatening consumption, occasioned by the rupture of a blood vessel, which finally removed him from the world, December 30, 1803. Dr. Backus was justly esteemed by his people while living, and lamented at death. Theological seminaries not having then come into existence, nearly fifty persons sought his instruction in Theology, and such of them as are yet among the living, as do many others with whom he was associated, continue to cherish his memory with affection. During the ministry of Dr. Backus, he informs us, in a sermon published near the close of his life, there were four seasons of special revival.

These occurred in the years 1774, 1783, 1797, and 1800, the second and third seasons brought large numbers into the church. During the twenty-nine years of his ministry about two hundred and eighty were received into this branch of the christian family.

Your present pastor was ordained, April 3, 1805. The church then consisted of about two hundred members. Of these many have been recommended to the care of sister churches, and many have gone to their long home. Since my ordination we have been blessed of a merciful God, with several seasons of religious revival. The first occurred during the winter and spring of 1809; the second in the summer of 1820; and the third and greatest in the summer and fall of 1822. Besides these revivals there have been two or three other periods, when the church has been refreshed, and a few have been added to the Lord. In the whole, there have been added to the church during my ministry two hundred and eighty-eight. The present number on our records is two hundred and forty-two. Of these about eighty are males, and one hundred and sixty-two females. It is worthy of remark that this church has from the beginning been served by those who held the doctrines of the New-England fathers, who encouraged revivals of religion, and who received none into full communion in the church but upon a profession of piety. The covenant now used in the admission of members is the same that has been used from the first.

In giving a history of this church we must not omit to speak of those who have sustained the office of Deacon. The two first who were chosen were James Wood and Nathaniel Horton, Jr. They were appointed to that office April 20, 1723, one year after the organization of this church. They continued to serve the church, the former forty-five, and the latter forty-six years. Deacon Wood was seized with a nervous shock about six years before his death; he died February 12, 1779, aged 83. Deacon Horton resigned his office in 1774, and died June 6, 1790, aged 94. On the day of his resignation his son, Nathaniel Horton, was chosen to his place. In 1777, he removed from this town. June 7, 1775, Joshua

Pomeroy was chosen to the office of Deacon. Two years after, June 18, 1777, the church appointed Joseph Sexton, Jr. to that office, and Aaron Horton the son of the first Deacon Horton. Deacon Horton, on account of ill health, resigned his office in 1796, and died August 13, 1800, in the 67th year of his age. Deacon Pomeroy died September 3, 1823, aged 86. Deacon Sexton died January 16, 1819, aged 94. September 30, 1796, Jabez Collins was chosen to the office of Deacon. In the spring of 1807, in consequence of the age and infirmities of Deacons Pomeroy and Sexton, the church excused them at their request from the active duties of their office, and chose Samuel Reynolds and Solomon Billing. Deacon Reynolds having removed to Longmeadow in 1824, the church, November 23, 1826, chose David Cady to supply his place. Four of these ten are still among the living. Of the six who have been called to give an account of their stewardship, we know not but we may speak with decided approbation. They served God and his church faithfully, and we trust have fallen asleep in Jesus.

When this town was first settled, very small advantages were enjoyed by the young for experiencing the benefit of schools. While it existed as a precinct of Enfield, application was made to the town on the subject of money that had been paid by the precinct, probably, into the town treasury for the support of schools, and in 1731, the town voted to move the town school to the East Precinct, over Scantick. For many years, even within the memory of individuals now before me, there was but one school in town. The only school house which was erected for years, was situated within a few rods of where I now stand. This school was kept only a few months in the year, and was occasionally moved into various parts of the society. The proprietors of lands in Enfield, seem never to have considered to how great advantage they might employ their power, in making a donation of land for the encouragement of schools. They gave aid to the society in the settlement of a minister; and the records inform us that they gave fifty acres of land to Thomas Purchase to encourage him to

commence his business as a black-smith, in this place. Still it is to be regretted that nothing was granted for the encouragement of schools. It is matter of thankfulness that through the bounty of the State, and the more just estimate in which literary instruction is held by the people, the advantage of schools is more extensively enjoyed.

The common allotments of Providence, both merciful and afflictive, have been experienced by this people. Death has in every generation swept away its multitudes, and in several instances fevers and dysentery have prevailed, and carried off in a single year, in one instance, one in twenty-nine, and in another, about one in twenty-six of the inhabitants, and our grave-yards contain more than walk in our streets. Still there have been an unusual number that have lived to old age. For the last fifty years, not less than one-fifth of the inhabitants of the town have lived to the age of seventy, and in one instance since I have served here in the ministry, seven persons have been living at one time who were ninety years old.

In reviewing our past history we find abundant cause for unfeigned gratitude. The days of old with which the fathers and ancient records have made us acquainted, furnish evidence of the wisdom and piety of the men who laid the foundation of our institutions. It is a ground of grateful recollection, that the fathers of this town entertained such just views of what belongs to a wise, virtuous, and prosperous community. They made early provision for the support of the Gospel. A minister was settled before there were two hundred inhabitants in the place. A meeting house was early built for the accommodation of the people. And it is worthy of particular notice, that with very short interruptions, the Gospel has been statedly preached here from the beginning. Nor has the dispensation of the Gospel been in vain. God has poured out his Spirit, and the number who have made profession of religion, has been very considerable, larger perhaps than in most places compared with the number of inhabitants. For this we are indebted to God in the first instance, and then to the wisdom and piety

of the first inhabitants of the town. They looked to the generations that should come after, and taught their children by precept and example to prize the institutions of religion. Had it been otherwise, their children would probably have grown up insensible to the value of christian privileges, and would have transmitted to unborn generations, the principles and views which a disregard for the Gospel and its institutions rarely fails to beget. Instead of being now engaged in this consecrated temple, and sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, the members of this church and congregation would, not improbably, have spent these sacred hours in pursuing their own employments and finding their own pleasures. How much is due to God that they were placed on such an eminence at the commencement of their associated existence!

Let it be remembered that these facts in the history of this people, not only demand gratitude, but address a language to all succeeding generations. They bid the guardians of the public interests to cherish those principles and institutions which their fathers cherished, and which, during a century, have brought such an amount of good to both the church and town. The same causes may be expected to produce the same effects. An opposite policy will be attended with different results.—“Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” Would you, my brethren, perpetuate the blessings which have been handed down from former generations, you must perpetuate the moral causes which produced these blessings. In vain will it be for you to expect them without. Shut up the doors of the sanctuary; neglect to teach your children to read; put out the light of the Gospel; close up the leaves of the Bible; and obliterate as far as possible every impression of a future judgment and eternal retribution; and if there be not a growth of infidelity and open profligacy, which will endanger even the very existence of society, it will be because depravity, abashed by her own deformity, voluntarily stops short of the object toward which her steps are directed. Point me to a place where there is no preaching of the Gospel,

no assembling for the worship of God, no religious instruction of children, and no intellectual cultivation, and I will point you to a place where there is no Sabbath, no moral principle, a general corruption of morals, and every evil work.

Two classes of persons are deeply interested in the instruction which a review of our history presents.

1. Those who are now on the stage of action.

The fathers have passed away. But they have left their counsels and their example, and what is more, their principles have been tested by the fruits of a hundred years. We have occasion, indeed, to mourn that there exists among us so much over which the early fathers of this people, could they for a moment take their stations in our houses and walk our streets, would weep. Still there are many things which they would regard as testimonials to the value of the institutions which they planted. Upon those who are on the stage of action, it now devolves to carry forward the work of former generations. You owe it to the fathers of this town; you owe it to their children of distant generations, to perpetuate the privileges and blessings, which they have transmitted to them, through your hands. Let them not die in your keeping. If you have any love for the cause of religion, or any regard for future generations, guard well the trust committed to you, and if it should fail to reach the most distant periods of your history, let it not be through any negligence or unfaithfulness of yours. Cultivate a deeper conviction of the value of all those institutions, which have been for so many generations the glory of New-England, and the foundation of the moral and religious prosperity of this people; and let no labors and no sacrifices be deemed too great to perpetuate them. Should you pass them safely through your hands, future generations will rise up and bless you, and it may be hoped that those to whom you transmit them will continue the transmission, and that they will eventually reach the most distant times.

Then will faith be found among this people, when the Son of man shall make his appearance. "Even so come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

2. To the youth in this place the subject speaks a loud and solemn language.

My dear young friends, your fathers, to whom it now belongs to be active in the concerns of the church and of the town, will soon pass away. Soon their voices will be silent in death. They will no more be able to plead on God's behalf, or to give their influence in favor of morality. To you who will soon take their places, we turn with deep solicitude. Can we depend on the youth in this place, when their fathers are dead, to love and cherish the inheritance bequeathed to them? When you occupy their places, and when your voices, your example and influence, will determine the destinies of this people, will you cherish the same institutions? Will you attend on the worship of God? Will you contribute your influence and your substance, so far as may be needful, to support public worship, and to perpetuate all those institutions which are connected with the Sabbath, and which have a mighty influence on the habits and moral feeling of the community? My young friends, you cannot undervalue these institutions innocently. A vast responsibility rests upon those who will soon take the affairs of this town, and this society, into their hands. To God you are responsible, and to posterity. Distant generations demand of you, that you faithfully guard their interests, nay, they entreat you with imploring hands, that you do not rob them of the civil and religious privileges which their fathers have transmitted to *you* to be sent down to *them*. May you be a generation eminently devoted to God. May you love the courts of the Lord, and be partakers of the grace of that Gospel which bringeth salvation. May God Almighty bless you and keep you, and make you blessings to thousands yet unborn; and when you have served him and your generation according to his will, may you go to join the company of the fathers of this people, who loved the Gospel and are now inheriting the promises.

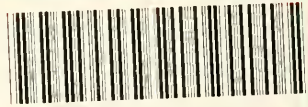
FINALLY. Brethren and friends of this congregation, let me remind you and myself, that we are rapidly passing toward the eternal world. "Our fathers, where are they?" Like them we shall soon lie down in the dust of death, and our immortal spirits appear before the Son of man. Another year of our mortal existence is fled, all that remains will soon be past. May we yield up our hearts to God. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."





(2/24/14)

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